

Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home
Lebanon Cemetery Road
Plains vicinity
Sumter County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-245

HABS
GA.

131-PLAIN. V.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

ADDITIONAL
FOLIOS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Addendum to
Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home (J.F. Plexico Home)
North side, Old Plains Highway (Lebanon Cemetery
Road) 2.3 miles west of Interstate 280
Plains Vicinity
Sumter County
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PHOTOGRAPHS
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JIMMY CARTER BOYHOOD HOME
(J.F. Plexico House)

HABS No. GA-245

Location: North side of Old Plains Highway (Lebanon Cemetery Road), 2.3 miles west of Interstate 280 in the outskirts of a community called Archery, Sumter County, Georgia.

USGS Plains Georgia Quadrant, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
Zone 16, N 3546000 E 742375.

Present Owner: Mrs. T. R. Downer.

Present Use: The home is unoccupied but is listed on the Plains tour and can be seen by passing motorists.

Significance: This was Jimmy Carter's childhood home from age 3 until he left Plains to attend college. The farm included a bungalow, commissary (see HABS No. GA-245-A), tenant houses (see HABS No. GA-245-B), a barn, several sheds, fields, and animal pens.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1922 is the year that Perry Plexico, son of J.F. Plexico, said that his father purchased the property and built the house. Although the property was never actually sold to the senior Plexico, it was deeded to him in 1921 by a J.S. Plexico of Barnwell, South Carolina, as a security. The debt was not paid off until eleven days after the house was sold to the Carters. This suggests that J.S. Plexico did not live on the property and supports Perry Plexico's recollection that his father, J.F., gained possession of the property in the early 1920s.

2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a chain of title to the land on which the building stands. Records are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

1911 Deed December 1, 1911, recorded December 11, 1911. Deed Book KK, page 22. J. Passmore to J.S. Plexico for \$3,240.

1921 Security Deed January 10, 1921, Deed Book WW, page 498. J.S. Plexico to J.F. Plexico as collateral for a loan. The loan was paid

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back January 1, 1928.

1928 Deed January 12, 1928, recorded January 17, 1928. Deed Book 9, page 290. J.S. Plexico to J.E. Carter, land lot 256 in Webster County and 101 acres in the east half of lot 16 and seven acres in the northeast corner of lot 15 in Sumter County for \$4,100.00.

1949 Deed December 14, 1949, recorded December 15, 1949, Deed Book 39, page 283. J.E. Carter to T.R. Downer.

3. Original plans and construction: None have been located.
4. Alterations and additions: Indoor plumbing and electricity were installed in the 1930s. The front porch was screened and awnings were added in the 1940s. The T.R. Downers made more than \$20,000.00 worth of improvements after purchasing the home in 1949, removing the wall between the kitchen and breakfast nook to enlarge the former, and removing a wall between Jimmy Carter's bedroom and the hall to create a family room. They also installed a dropped celotex ceiling and replaced the exterior clapboards with aluminum siding.

B. Historical Context: Jimmy Carter (born 1924) spent the first three years of his life in a house on Church Street, diagonally across from the Methodist Church, with a man named Emmet Cook; then with the Chambliss family on South Bond street; and finally, in a house adjacent to the house where Rosalynn Carter lived as a child, also on South Bond Street (see HABS No. GA-2203). His father, Earl Carter (1894-1953), was a respected businessman and civic leader in Plains; he operated a store in a building at the east end of the Main Street commercial block between Bond and Hudson streets (see HABS No. GA-2214). Jimmy Carter's sister, Gloria Carter Spann, recounts when the capital invested in the store fell to \$500.00, Earl closed the store and decided to move his family to Archery.¹ One of Jimmy Carter's earliest recollections is the day that his family moved to the farm in 1928. His father asked him to crawl through the window to the left of the front door when he realized that he had forgotten to get a key to the home he just purchased.²

Earl Carter bought the farm from John Franklin Plexico, who moved to Archery from Jacksonville, Florida, in the early 1920s with his wife, Minnie, and three children, J.F. Jr., Francis (now Francis Plexico Stewart), and Perry. Perry Plexico said his father built the house in 1922, six years before it was sold to

¹ Spann, 1989 interview.

² Jimmy Carter, 1988 interview.

the Carters.³

Jimmy Carter's boyhood on the farm was comfortable but not luxurious. His bedroom at the back of the house had no heat, and the house was not electrified until 1937 when the Rural Electrification Program was introduced in Sumter County. Gloria and her younger sister, Ruth, slept in the front bedroom, which shared a closet with the parents' bedroom just behind. Their mother, Lillian Gordy Carter (1898-1983), was a nurse at the Wise Sanitarium in Plains (see HABS No. GA-2213). Because she worked many hours away from home, the children were often left to fend for themselves. She would leave a list of chores for them to complete each day on a desk in the living room, which the children jokingly referred to as "mother."⁴

Although the children's lives were guided by the firm discipline of Earl Carter, the undisputed head of the family, Lillian had a strong ideological influence on her children. Ruth Carter Stapleton wrote in her book Brother Billy, "Mother was the one, who as a nurse, saw that blacks and whites were equal at birth and death and should share the same equality in life between those two points."⁵ Earl Carter's racial attitudes were more traditional, as Jimmy Carter illustrated in an anecdote from his childhood. One of the family's evening activities was listening to the radio together. On the night of the famous return match between Joe Lewis and Max Schmeling, the radio was propped in an open window so the black neighbors could stand outside under the mulberry tree to listen to the fight that would make Louis a black world champion heavyweight. Earl was quite disappointed when Louis won. The black neighbors quietly left, respectfully restraining loud, jubilant cheers until after they had reached a home on the other side of the railroad tracks.⁶ The Carters were the one of two permanent white families in Archery. Five black families lived in tenant houses surrounding the house and they worked regularly in the Carter's fields. Other black families in the area had their own "two horse" farms, of forty or so acres and often worked as day laborers for the Carters during hoeing and harvesting time.⁷ Jimmy Carter worked and played side-by-side with blacks, formulating at a young age the social attitudes that would later influence his political stance on issues of race and integration.

It was also on the Archery farm that he cultivated the industry and business sense that he would later use in the peanut warehouse business. The Carter's farm produced cotton, peanuts, fruits and vegetables, dairy cattle,

³ Plexico, 1988 interview.

⁴ Rosalynn Carter, 1988 interview.

⁵ Stapleton, Brother Billy, 1978, p. 14.

⁶ Jimmy Carter, Why Not the Best?, 1975, pp. 36-37.

⁷ Carter, 1989 letter.

chickens, hogs and sheep, and all the family members partook fully in the arduous chores of farm life. Carter describes in detail his responsibilities even as a young child, in his book, Why not the Best?⁸ Earl Carter was constantly embarking on new business ventures, and for a time produced a line of farm products, called Plains Maid, which were sold throughout the county. Plains Maid included dairy products, home-made syrup and at one unfortunate time, catsup; something went wrong with the recipe, and as the catsup aged, it expanded and the bottles exploded.⁹ When the family moved to Archery, he transferred merchandise from his Plains store to a commissary located southeast of the house. The store sold food staples, overalls, work shoes, kerosene, tobacco and snuff, rat traps, and other household items. Also kept in stock were products produced on the farm, such as syrup, lard, cured meats, stuffed sausage, wool blankets, and the catsup.¹⁰ Jimmy Carter inherited his father's business skills and ventured into town on weekends to sell the boiled peanuts he picked from his father's fields, prepared and bagged.

Also on the farm, Jimmy Carter learned to appreciate the environment, spending his leisure time trekking through the fields and fishing in nearby streams and ponds. He also pursued his favorite hobby, reading. He even read books at the dinner table, as did the rest of the family; this was a habit passed on to his daughter, Amy, who was known to bring books to official state dinners during his presidency. Ruth Carter Stapleton recalls that the dining room table was the study center in the house as well as the site of many competitive board games played by the whole family. "Jimmy loved to win," she wrote, "The will to win certainly was honed, if not forged there."¹¹ The Carter children also learned to play tennis on one of the few courts in the area located between the house and the commissary.

Jimmy Carter's dream in those days was to attend college. Realizing that higher education would place a financial burden on the family, he set his mind on getting into a military academy. As a boy, Jimmy admired Lillian Carter's younger brother, Tom, who told stories of his adventures in the Navy and ultimately influenced his choice to attend the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. Busy with his own plans, Jimmy scarcely noticed Rosalynn Smith, a girl from Plains who came out to the farm often to visit her best friend, Ruth. Lillian had helped to nurse Rosalynn's father, Edgar, and brought the 13-year-old Rosalynn out to the farm the night of his death in 1941. Rosalynn and Ruth became fast friends and Rosalynn remembers having a crush on a picture of Jimmy in his

⁸ Carter, 1975, pp. 19-30.

⁹ Jimmy Carter, 1988 interview.

¹⁰ Carter, 1975, p. 19.

¹¹ Stapleton, 1978, p. 10.

Naval Academy uniform, which hung in Ruth's bedroom.¹² Finally the two girls were successful in their scheme to set up a date between Rosalynn and Jimmy, and shortly thereafter Jimmy returned to the farm and told his mother that Rosalynn was the girl he would some day marry.¹³

After Jimmy left for college, his bedroom was handed down to his younger brother, Billy, until the family sold the farm and moved back to Plains in 1947. Mr. and Mrs. Richard Downer purchased the farm from the Carters, and Mrs. Downer, now a widow continues to own it today, although she resides in another house in Plains. The house was declared part of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site in 1988, and negotiations are currently underway for its purchase by the National Park Service.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house is a southern adaptation of the bungalow, built during the early twentieth century, featuring a low-pitch roofline and a full porch spanning front facade.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The house is a one-story, basically bilaterally symmetrical rectangular plan with cross gables. It measures 73'-11" front to back. A three-bay porch extends across the front, or southwest facade, which measures 34'-3". Another three-bay porch extends across the western three-quarters of the rear, or northeast facade. The third bay of the four-bay northwest facade projects out from the house under a side gable. A somewhat shallower side gable also projects from the third bay of the four-bay southeast facade.
2. Foundations: Brick piers infilled with concrete block; both are painted dark brown.
3. Walls: Yellow, modern vinyl siding with dark brown trim now covers all of the exterior walls obscuring the original white weatherboard underneath.
4. Structural System, framing: Wood frame.

¹² Rosalynn Carter, 1988 interview.

¹³ Carter, 1975, p. 62.

5. Porches, stoops: The full front porch is 34'-3" wide and 9'-11" deep. Three concrete steps lead up to the porch, flanked by brick wingwalls topped by square brick coping painted brown. Four large piers consisting of wood posts set on massive uncut piers with brown concrete plinths define the bays. Screens added by the Carters in the late 1940s now enclose the porch. The screening is supported in large rectangular wood frames, four across the first and third bay, one on either side of the screen door in the middle bay, and three on each of side of the porch. A modern aluminum awning was installed around the three sides of the porch after the Downers purchased the house.

A three-bay porch spans the northern three-fourths of the northeast/rear facade. It has also been screened-in above a 3' high closed rail. Outside of the screening is a brown wood lattice. Four concrete steps with metal-pipe handrails lead to the door in the center bay of the porch. An aluminum awning also surrounds the back porch.

6. Chimneys: Two square rough-cut stone interior chimneys on the northwest and southeast slopes of the roof serve double fireplaces.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: A one-light, three-cross-panel door is centered in the middle bay of the southeast/front facade. A wood-frame screen door on the front porch is on axis with the front door. The northwest/rear facade has two doors leading from the porch to the interior. The east door has five panels with a large square light cut into it under the double top panels; the west door has five panels. An aluminum screen door opens into the center bay of the porch.
- b. Windows and shutters: Most of the windows, unless otherwise indicated, are one-over-one-light, double-hung wood sash encased in dark-brown synthetic siding. The windows on the front facade are wider than the others and are two-over-two-light sash with white trim. The southeast facade has windows in the first and fourth bays, and the protruding gabled bay has a double window. To the right of the protruding bay is a square nine-light fixed window that is in the bathroom. The rear of the house features only one window, located to the left of the back porch in what was Jimmy's room. The northwest facade has six windows: a single-light fixed window in the first bay which is over the kitchen sink; double-hung wood sash in the second and fourth bays and on both sides of the protruding gabled bay, which has a double window facing northwest.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The low-pitch hipped roof is covered with asbestos shingles. A standing-seam metal shed roof covers the back porch. On the rear facade, a small shed roof supported by brackets shelters the fuse box.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves are boxed with soffits constructed from the same material as the siding. The side gables have open rakes and are bracketed at the junction of the roof to the wall and at the top. Early photographs indicate the dwelling had open eaves with exposed notched rafters.
- c. Dormers: A shed-roofed dormer houses a double louvered ventilator in the center of the southwest facade.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The floor plan is arranged around a single hall that leads from the front door to the back. The house is two rooms wide and three rooms deep, with the three bedrooms on the southeast side of the house; the living room, dining room, and kitchen are arranged, respectively, from front to back on the northwest side.
2. Flooring: The master bedroom and dining room have wall-to-wall carpeting over a wood-joist floor. The kitchen, bathroom, and part of the hall and Jimmy's room have linoleum floors. The flooring in the living room and front bedroom is hardwood and is probably original.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plaster on lath, painted white. The bathroom has a floral and striped wallpaper. Jimmy Carter's bedroom, which has been converted to a den, has modern sheet paneling. The ceilings have been lowered and covered in some rooms with acoustical tile. The ceiling in Jimmy's room has a swirled plaster finish.
4. Doorways and doors: Flanking the fireplaces in the dining room, master bedroom and the northeast wall of the front bedroom, are small doors accessing closets. These five, six-cross panel doors are 5'-10". Doors leading from all rooms to the hall are full-sized six-cross-panel: the same also lead from the master bedroom to the bathroom and from the bathroom to the hall. A fifteen-light door has been added to the hall separating the den (formerly Jimmy Carter's bedroom) from the front of the house.

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5. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The house was originally heated by fireplaces and wood heaters in the master bedroom and the front bedroom that exhausted through the fireplaces. Another wood stove was located in the center of the kitchen. The fireplace in the master bedroom is on the southwest wall and shares a stack with the fireplace in the front bedroom on the northeast wall. Similarly, the fireplace in the living room shares a stack with that in the dining room. The fireplace in the living room is brick; the other three are wood (painted white) with decorative turned posts supporting delicate mantels.
- b. Lighting: Each room has a central ceiling fixture and the kitchen has an light panel in the center of the room inset in the tile ceiling. The house was electrified in 1937.
- c. Plumbing: Originally, the house had no indoor plumbing. During the 1930/40s there was a well on the left side of the porch. A windmill and a high tank provided running water for the bathroom. The bathroom between the master bedroom and the den was added when the house got indoor plumbing after 1937. Where the tub is now located along the southeast wall, there was a makeshift shower consisting of a bucket of water with holes and a sloped floor so the water would run out the side of the house. The kitchen has double sinks and there is a sink in the small room adjoining the front bedroom and the master bedroom.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house is located on more than 300 acres of farmland near railroad tracks and faces southwest onto the Old Plains Highway.
2. Historic landscape design: The area around the house was originally surfaced with sand. A circular drive led from the road to the house. Northwest of the house is a pecan grove planted by Jimmy Carter and his father in the mid 1930s. There was a tennis court between the house and the store to the southeast.
3. Outbuildings:
 - a. Store: A 36'-2" x 20' x 3" frame commissary with a standing-seam metal roof is located southeast of the house (see HABS No. GA-245-A). The structure has a concrete-slab floor/foundation. The

Downers added the two shed roofs, each supported on four wood posts, are attached to either side. A hipped roof spans the front/southeast side, supported two uncoursed stone piers with wood posts similar to those on the front of the house.

- b. Tenant house: A one-story, cross-gable-roofed tenant house is located northeast of the house (see HABS No. GA-245-B). The deteriorated structure has two chimneys.
- c. Barn: A two-story, wood, gable-roofed barn with a brick-pier foundation is located about 600' east of the house. A concrete-lined trough for dipping sheep runs along the east side of this badly deteriorated structure. The builder, a Scotsman named Mr. Valentine, who specialized in building barns, erected the structure soon after the Carters moved to Archery.¹⁴
- d. Buggy shed: A frame, gable-roofed structure west of the barn was used to store vehicles. It has a standing-seam metal roof and is in good condition.
- e. Other outbuildings: The remains of a pump shed and milk shed are extant west of the buggy shed. Historical structures that are no longer extant include a smokehouse, about 75' northeast of the house; a privy, about 150' north of the house; and a blacksmith shop where minor repairs were done, about 450' southeast of the house.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: None have been located.
- B. Early Views:

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural and Conservation Service aerial photographs taken in 1937, 1948, and 1953 reveal much about the landscaping and outbuildings on the farm.

A 1948 photograph shows the house before the improvements made by the Downers.

- C. Interviews:

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter videotape, interview by Ed Bearss, National Park

¹⁴ Carter, 1989 letter.

Service, May 1988, Plains, Georgia.

Perry Plexico, former resident, interview by Beth Walters, 1988, Plains, Georgia.

Gloria Carter Spann, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 23, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deeds are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

Carter, Jimmy, letter dated September 28, 1989.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Carter, Jimmy, Why Not the Best? Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1976.

Stapleton, Ruth Carter, Brother Billy, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978.

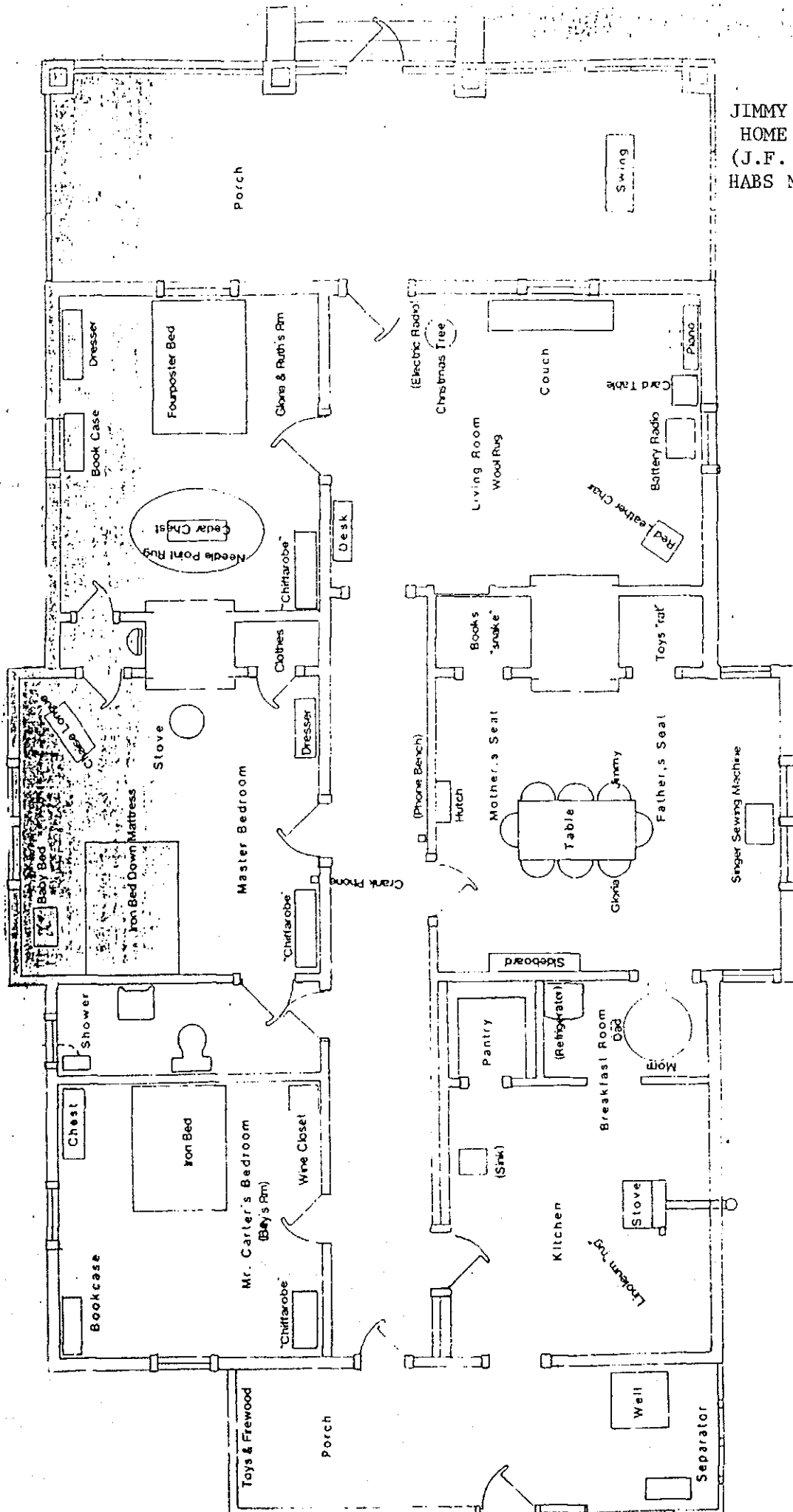
E. Supplemental Material:

A floor plan of the house indicating the placement of furniture during Jimmy Carter's childhood has been drawn By John Tucker, superintendent of the Andersonville National Historic Site, from information compiled through interviews with the Carters and Gloria Carter Spann. Tucker also drew a ground plan of the property indicating the placement of outbuildings and landscaping during the 1930s from information also compiled from interviews, as well as the aerial photographs taken during that time. These drawings are located at the Andersonville National Cemetery, Andersonville, Georgia.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Barthold
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National Park Service
Summer 1989

DR

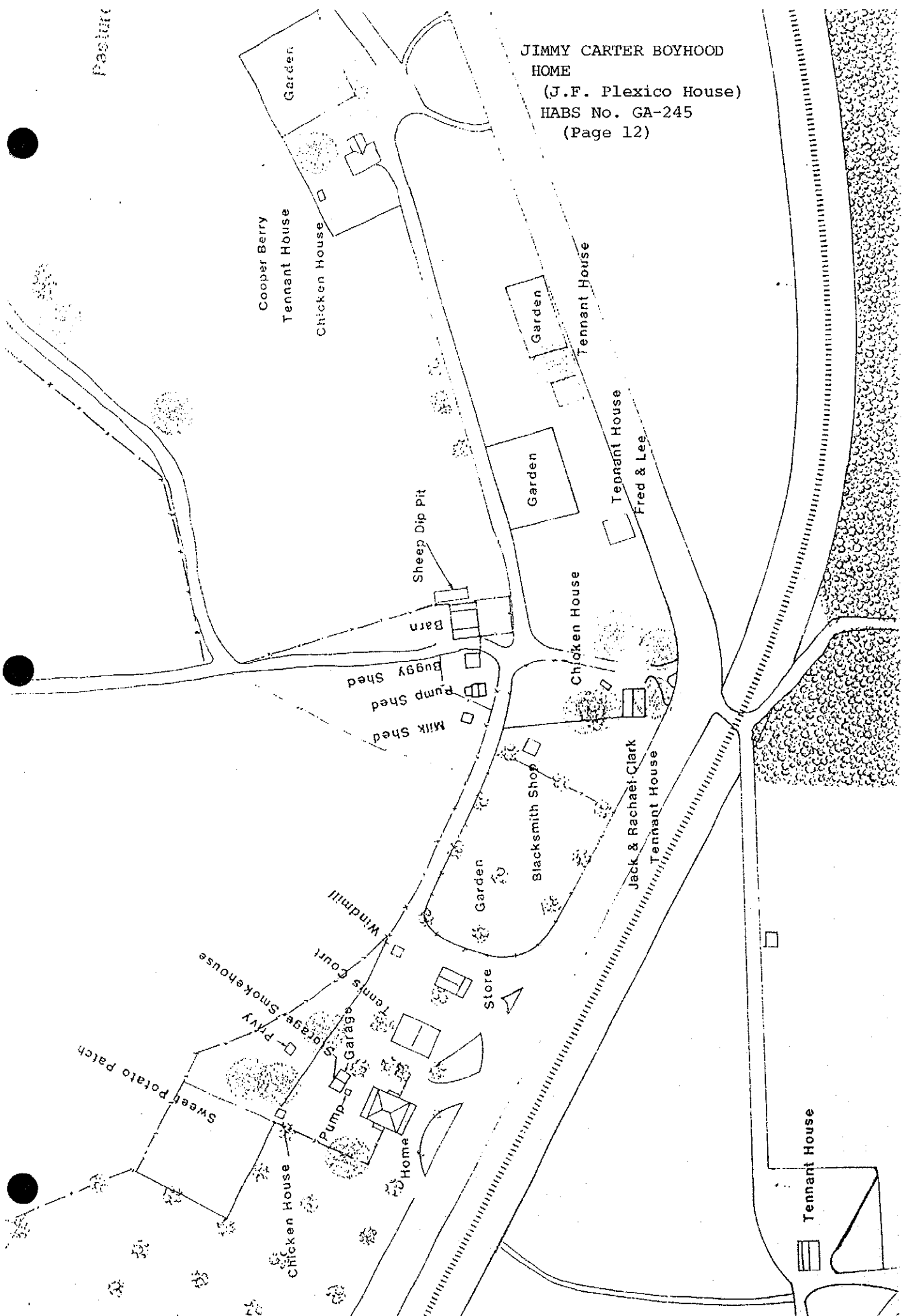
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Supplemental Material Sheet 1
JIMMY CARTER BOYHOOD HOME (J.F. Plexico House) Floor plan and furniture arrangement in ca. 1938

Pasture

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